

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS  
COMMUNITY MEETING  
SEPTEMBER 2, 2003  
FT. BRADEN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL  
DISTRICT 2

The Board of County Commissioners of Leon County, Florida met at a Community meeting in District 2 at the Ft. Braden Elementary School with Chairman Grippa presiding. Present were Commissioners Sauls, Thaell, Winchester, Proctor, Rackleff and Maloy. Also present were County Attorney Herb Thiele, County Administrator Parwez Alam, and Deputy Clerk Sandra C. O'Neal. The meeting was called to order at 6:45 p.m.

Invocation was provided by George Farr, Music Minister of Lake Talquin Baptist Church at the invitation of Commissioner Sauls. It was followed by the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

Commissioner Thaell moved, duly seconded by Commissioner Winchester and carried unanimously, 6/0 (Commissioner Proctor was not present), to appoint Commissioner Sauls as Chairperson for tonight's meeting.

**Presentation**

District 2 - A presentation was made by Kimley-Horn and Associates and C. B. Subrahmanyam on the Big Bend Scenic Byway in Leon County of which a large portion goes through District 2.

Eric Hines of Kimley-Horn Associates gave a brief introduction of the Big Bend Scenic Byway. It is a proposed 248-mile roadway that runs through Leon, Franklin, Wakulla and Liberty counties. Mr. Hines explained that Big Bend Scenic Byway is a grass roots effort and is made up of members of this community as well as communities in other counties and it starts with a corridor advocacy group.

Mr. C. B. Subrahmanyam, Vice chair of the Leon County portion of the Big Bend Scenic Byway, explained that the advocacy group is attempting to preserve Highway 20 and the character of the neighborhood along with other highways included in the Big Bend Scenic Highway. Three handouts were circulated to the Board and to citizens. This included a map and description of the Florida Scenic Highways Program. The project will help bring overdue recognition for the area and the valuable recreation resources that are located in West and Southwest Leon County, as well as opportunities to improve these resources.

The proposed Scenic Byway corridor is 38.5 miles long and originates on Springhill Road (CR 2203) at the Wakulla County Line located in southern Leon County, and progresses north 8.1 miles to Capital Circle (SR 263), then, turning northwest (left) on Capital Circle, it continues 4.5 miles to Blountstown Highway (SR 20). Turning left, the scenic corridor moves west on Highway 20 for 17.7 miles along the northern border of the Apalachicola National Forest until it reaches Smith Creek Road just before the Ochlockonee Bridge. At Smith Creek Road the Byway veers left and meanders Southwest for about 8.2 miles, ending at the Wakulla County Line.

Mr. Subrahmanyam explained that it is important for Leon County citizens to become involved and the process begins with a group called the Corridor Advocacy Group (CAG). Once the group is formed, they will be able to participate in writing the proposal along with help from the consultants in order to receive approval of the project. Mr. Subrahmanyam encouraged citizens to become involved and to sign up to be CAG members.

Chairperson Sauls announced that for individual who wish to become involved, there will be a meeting on this issue on September 15<sup>th</sup> at City Hall at 6:00 p.m.

### **Status Reports**

#### **1. Update on the Community Redevelopment Area**

Vince Long, Assistant County Administrator, explained the Community Redevelopment Area (CRA). The City is proposed to make Tallahassee a downtown CRA; a CRA is essentially a geographically defined area that is targeted for economic development and it redevelops slum and blighted areas. By establishing a CRA, the City automatically can do certain things statutorily that they cannot do without a CRA. Mr. Long explained that the CRA will result in a major cost to taxpayers - approximately \$80 million over the next 20 years and the City has a few approval steps remaining. If the CRA is approved, it will have expounded powers of eminent domain (condemn private property) and will be able to exercise TIF (tax increment financing), which is a redirection of County property taxes to the City's Trust Fund and is for the exclusive use of projects inside the City limits. Mr. Long explained that County approval is not needed for the proposed downtown CRA and he raised the question: Does the downtown deserve the County's attention and if so, is a CRA the appropriate tool?

*Commissioner Proctor arrived at the meeting at 7:10 p.m.*

Mr. Long explained that normally CRA's work with the City and the County working together and both decide if a CRA should be pursued. He noted that it is important that citizens realize that the City claims that they are not creating a new CRA but are expanding the existing Frenchtown CRA to include downtown; it is a loophole that exists and is not an argument that the County accepts. The County will not be able to absorb the \$80 million and two things could occur; either reduce County services or raise County millage rates.

Commissioner Grippa urged citizens to contact the City Commissioners regarding the CRA. Mr. Long announced that the County Commission has a joint meeting schedule with the City Commission for a Conflict Resolution Meeting for September 15, 2003 at 3:00 p.m. at City Hall to address this issue.

## 2. Update on Emergency Medical Services

Mr. Vince Long, Assistant County Administrator, explained that in September 2002 Tallahassee Memorial Hospital announced that they could no longer continue to provide emergency medical services and Life Flight due to financial hardships of the hospital. In the spring of 2003, County/City staff worked with consultants on appropriate EMS model for the community. In July 2003, after unsuccessful negotiations with the City, the County voted to implement a County-run EMS Department. The County system will be activated on January 1, 2004.

Mr. Long further explained that County will continue to provide the highest level of care to the community and there will be increased emphasis on training EMS professionals and on ALS (advanced life support) arriving on the scene faster and training for first responders. Air Ambulance Emergency Medical and Transport Services were secured in July 2003 at no cost to the County and Air methods "LifeNet" service will be operating locally and stationed at the Tallahassee airport.

The funding source for EMS was explained to citizens. A Municipal Services Taxing Unit (MSTU) in the amount of 0.5 mill will be imposed for the first year of service and plans to be reduced to 0.2 mill in the out years.

The following citizens appeared:

Will Blanton, 2121 Heavens Court, asked how dispatch would be handled. Mr. Long explained that dispatch would be handled by the Leon County Sheriff Department.

Louis Maige, citizen, voiced concern that property taxes would be used to pay for EMS. He suggested that some type of tax be placed on automobile tags to pay for EMS so that nearly everyone in the County would pay for the service and the burden would not be solely on the taxpayers. Mr. Long responded that the County has very restrictive revenue sources available and this would not be one of them.

Commissioner Grippa also pointed out that there should be a joint dispatch center for all emergency calls and the County is working with the City Commission in an attempt to have a joint dispatch operated by both the City Police Department and the Sheriffs' Department.

Other citizens appeared:

Will Blanton, 2121 Heavens Court, spoke on the importance of timeliness as it relates to dispatch of emergency calls.

Commissioner Rackleff spoke on the capital costs for the County-run EMS for the first year and noted that the County's plan is to reduce the cost by at least half in the second year and to eliminate the MSTU for the EMS in the third year.

Commissioner Thael stated that the upcoming budget, beginning October 1, 2003, will include \$875,000 for two branch libraries, in District 3 and District 5, which totals \$1.75 million. He stated that he supports libraries but he would recommend to not build the branch libraries this year and defer the construction for one or two years; the money could be used for Capital costs for the EMS such as purchasing ambulances, etc., which would completely eliminate the MSTU tax next year for Emergency Management Services.

Commissioner Winchester explained that the County has come up with a 4-year plan for a County EMS and pointed out the importance of continuing construction for the branch libraries. He voiced his disagreement with Commissioner Thael about deferring construction of the Branch libraries and advised that Commissioner Thael also voted for the expenditure of funds to purchase the Fringe Benefit Building suggesting that the money could have been used to defray costs for the EMS.

Kenneth Harvey, citizen and Volunteer Fire Department, asked where the ambulances would be situated and the status of the paramedics with ALS (advanced life support) in the County. Mr. Long responded that ALS would be provided in one of two ways; by the Tallahassee Fire Department (TFD) assigned at the existing stations or it will be provided as a part of the County's overall EMS system with an additional paramedic and a quick-response vehicle assigned to existing fire stations in the County. The County will be negotiating an agreement with the City of Tallahassee on this issue.

3. **Overview of the Fiscal Year 2003/2004 Operating and Capital Improvement Budget**

Alan Rosenzweig, Director of Office of Management and Budget (OMB), referred to the blue handout and the overhead screen, which explains the budget overview. This is the first budget prepared since the citizens approved the Home Rule Charter County (November 2002). The long-term lasting impact is that the County will be able to eliminate the Fire Services MSTU and the Water/Sewer Franchise Fee and replace it with the more equitable Public Services Tax, which is charged to all users of utilities. Also, by use of the Communications Service Tax (CST), the Board was able to commit money to the flooded property acquisition program

The Board also enacted the Senior Homestead Exemption a couple of years ago and approximately 1,900 seniors have qualified for the exemption which saved senior taxpayers \$414,000.

Mr. Rosenzweig explained that the majority of budgeted money (32%) goes to Public Safety (i.e. Sheriff, EMS, Fire Services) and is summarized in the blue handout, which also compares budgets of other counties of comparable size. He reported that Leon County has the smallest budget and the lowest spending per capita than other counties that provide a high level of service. Leon County has the highest exempt property due to State government and universities. The ongoing Capital Projects in District 2 involves the Ft. Braden Library which should open in the winter of this year; the Capital Cascades Greenway which will develop a public trail and greenway from Lake Henrietta and Lake Munson; the corridor study for reconstruction of Tharpe Street from Ocala Road to Capital Circle Northwest; Lakeview Bridge which will connect Lake Bradford and Grassy Lake with low bridge floodwaters from overtopping Lakeview Drive; and flooding purchases in the Liberty Ridge area (involving Districts 1 and 2).

### **Status on the Ft. Braden Library**

Commissioner Sauls explained that there has been a lot of rain and construction of the Ft. Braden Library was a little behind schedule. Helen Moeller, Library Director, reported that due to the rain, the opening of the library is planned for mid-December if all goes well, although the contractor has until mid-February 2004 to complete it. Ms. Moeller showed the various colors planned for the library. Commissioner Sauls stated that since the library and community center are adjacent to each other, they plan to have a walkway between the facilities.

The following citizens appeared:

Craig A. Fletcher, 228 Coe Landing Road, thanked the Commission for spraying for mosquitoes in the area. He also mentioned that a great deal of land in the County is in the National Forest and cautioned the Board about purchasing additional properties which would be taken off the tax rolls. He pointed out that the area is growing fast and there are not enough roads being built to provide for the growth.

Will Blanton, 2121 Heavens Court, encouraged the Board to consider constructing areas for bicycling and a park area. He suggested rather than purchasing more property, to enter into a contractual agreements with the State for lease of property. Commissioner Sauls stated that this would be looked at.

Sam Bruce, 24134 Lake Talquin Drive, talked about the problems he had encountered with the roll-off site at Joe Thomas Road. When he attempted to dump trash from his trailer he was told by the attendant that his trailer was too large although the amount of trash on his trailer was acceptable. In another incident, Mr. Bruce took his pickup truck to the roll-off site to empty trash and was told that the trash was stacked too high. He then went home, re-stacked the items and took it back to the roll-off site and was allowed to dump the trash. Mr. Bruce asked that the Commission investigate the problem and that common sense be used at the roll-off sites.

Commissioner Sauls indicated that this was an ongoing problem and she hopes that staff can resolve the issue. She stated that the landfill is 35 miles from the area and people will not travel that far to dump trash. The County Administrator would check into the issue at the roll-off site. It was noted that the transfer station on Aeonon Church Road would not be open to the public until Capital

Circle is four-laned as recommended by the Citizens Advisory Committee.

Commissioner Thael spoke on illegal dumping and stated that it was destroying much of the rural areas. He pointed out that there are DEP programs and other organizations with grant monies that could assist which would send a message to people responsible for illegal dumping. He urged County staff to consider this item.

Frank Bracewell, 101 Trail Way, stated that he pays for education for Leon County through his property taxes. He noted that students and the community were continually having bake sales and other benefits for educational purposes. He wanted to know why the lottery money was not being used for the purpose that it was intended, noting that lottery money is being held in the bank and drawing interest on lottery tickets that have not been claimed within the designated 180 days. Staff indicated that they were not knowledgeable about the State Lottery laws.

Commissioner Rackleff pointed out that one County initiative is the water quality of Lake Talquin. He pointed out that Cairo, Georgia is not in compliance with water quality standards and continues to dump raw sewage into tributaries of the Ochlockonee River. Commissioner Rackleff stated that as a result Lake Talquin is a stormwater pond for pollution that comes across the state of Georgia. There is also a proposal near Cairo to dam one of the tributaries, Tired Creek, to create a lake and valuable real estate with lake front homes, which could result in adverse impacts to Leon County and Lake Talquin. A law firm in Washington, D.C. is looking into various legal options available to Leon County. A status report will be provided at the September 16<sup>th</sup> Commission meeting.

Commissioner Grippa encouraged citizens to contact the City regarding the Community Redevelopment Area (CRA) issue discussed earlier tonight since it would result in an unfair tax to Leon County citizens.

There being no further business to come before the Board, the meeting was adjourned at 8: 27 p.m.

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_  
Tony Grippa, Chairman

ATTEST:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Bob Inzer, Chairman